

How To Choose A Compost Bin



Quick tips on what to look for when selecting a yard waste compost bin.

DO I NEED A BIN?

You can make compost many different ways—with or without a compost bin. Building a **brush pile** is one of the simplest composting methods. Any area of the yard away from foot traffic and near a water source is suitable. Some shade is preferable. Be sure to check the pile so that it stays moist and is not disturbed by animals. Leave it for a season and don't add any food wastes.

Materials will break down over time and rich, dark, earthy-smelling compost that looks like soil will form at the bottom. After a season you can remove all the materials from the top and separate the finished from unfinished compost. Use unfinished compost to start a new pile.



What Do I Plan To Compost?	Recommendations
Yard Waste Only – leaves, branches and twigs, prunings, grass clippings*	Brush pile, or any type of bin with or without a lid
All of the above, plus weeds	Not recommended for backyard composting. Put weedy waste out for yard waste collection unless you can do “hot” composting (see explanation below).
Kitchen scraps	Worm bin or food composter
Pet waste	Do not compost pet waste. Pet wastes can carry disease harmful to humans. Bury pet waste in ornamental garden beds and cover with at least 8" of soil or wrap and place in trash.
Sod	Turn sod pieces face down, stack and moisten with water, then cover with plastic sheet. Leave in place and it will decompose over time.

**It's best to grasscycle and leave grass clippings on the lawn to add moisture and nutrients.*

YARD WASTE BINS –WHAT SIZE?

(Hot composting vs. cold composting)

Most bins on the market hold one-half to three-quarters of a cubic yard of yard waste and serve very well for cold composting, which is

the most common kind of backyard composting. Cold composting takes longer (6 months to a year) as the pile doesn't heat up. Weed seeds usually aren't killed. Hot composting can generate enough internal heat to kill some (but not all) weed seeds, and materials will decompose more quickly. Hot composting requires a yard waste volume of about 1 cubic yard. If

you want to hot compost, buy or build a bin that will hold at least 1 cubic yard of yard waste (36" x 36" x 36"). With hot composting, you need to pay attention to the right combination of brown waste and green waste (about 50% of each, mixed or layered) add water and turn and mix the pile often.

MORE INFO ON BACK ➔

Five Easy Steps to:
Natural Yard Care



 **King County**
Department of
Natural Resources and Parks



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King County
Department of
Natural Resources and Parks
Solid Waste Division
206-296-4466
711 (TTY)
www.metrokc.gov/soils

TIPS for Successful Composting

- The composting process speeds up when materials are chopped or shredded.
- Water and air are important for composting success. Bin contents should be moist like a wrung out sponge.
- If compost smells, there may be too much green waste in the bin and not enough air. Add dry leaves and twigs and mix together. Dry leaves and twigs (smaller than 1" in diameter) serve as bulking agents and make spaces for air.
- Don't compost pet waste. Pet wastes can carry disease harmful to humans. Bury pet wastes in ornamental garden beds and cover with at least 8" of soil, or wrap and place in trash.
- Don't put kitchen waste in your backyard compost bin. It can attract rodents and pests. Consider a worm bin or food composter instead.
- Use your finished compost to build healthy soil in your yard by mixing into planting beds or as a mulch on top of garden beds.

YARD WASTE BINS SHOULD:

- Have vents or air holes so air can circulate through.
- Have a lid large enough to easily put materials in, turn the materials, and take finished compost out.
- Be light enough for a person to move.
- Be rodent-resistant. Some yard wastes may attract rodents. If a bin is labeled rodent-resistant, it still may not be rodent-proof.

Compost food wastes separately in a worm bin* or food composter such as the Green Cone, or bury them in your yard and cover with at least 8" of soil.

***Worm bins** and food composters are great for kitchen waste! Find worm composting and worm bin information on line at: www.metrokc.gov/soils or call the Natural Lawn & Garden Hotline at **206-633-0224**. The Washington State University web site on kitchen waste has information on both worm bins and green cones. <http://gardening.wsu.edu/stewardship/compost/kitchen/kitwaste.htm>.

Worms Eat My Garbage by Mary Appelhof is a popular book on worm composting.

HOW MANY BINS?

Get one bin, if you:

- Have a small city yard (lot size less than 3,500 square feet)
- Rarely need to put out more than one container of yard waste
- Leave clippings on the lawn and have only one tree that drops leaves

Get two or more bins, if you:

- Have a medium-to-large sized yard (3,500 square feet or larger)
- Regularly have more than one container of yard waste at a time
- Want to compost your grass clippings or have large trees that drop leaves
- Have big flower beds and a vegetable garden
- Want to make as much compost as possible to use in the garden

A wide variety of compost bins can be seen at www.composters.com. (Click on the leaf.)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Soil building and compost information (King County) at www.metrokc.gov/soils
- Natural lawn and garden care (City of Seattle) at seattle.gov/util/rescons
- Free brochures are available through the **Natural Lawn & Garden Hotline** at **206-633-0224**
 - Instructions for building your own bin
 - Turn Over a New Leaf – Compost for Healthy Soil
 - Natural Yard Care – Five steps to make your piece of the planet a healthier place to live
 - Natural Lawn & Garden Guides – Composting at Home & Growing Healthy Soil

This information is available in alternative formats upon request for individuals with disabilities.